

---

# Planning for climate change and flood risk – training and skills survey for local planning authorities

Publication of survey results  
March 2023

---

<b>1 Overview</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Headline findings	3
1.2 Background	3
1.3 Promotion	3
1.4 Survey respondents	4
<b>2 Survey results – About you</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 Question 2: Job Title	4
2.2 Question 5: Type of authority	5
<b>3 Survey results – Your authority’s training need</b>	<b>5</b>
3.1 Question 6: To what extent do you agree that you have the relevant skills and expertise to take planning decisions/recommendations that account for flood risk and the impacts of climate change on flood risk?	5
3.2 Question 7: To what extent do you agree that your authority has the capacity and resources to take planning decisions that account for flood risk and the impacts of climate change on flood risk?	6
3.3 Question 8: How would you rate your current level of knowledge of the following flood risk management topics and activities?	7
3.4 Question 9: Which five flood risk management topics would you prioritise for training and resources to develop your understanding and knowledge? Choose up to five with ‘1’ indicating the highest priority:	9
3.5 Question 10: What type of training resources do you consider would be most useful to improve your understanding of flood risk issues? Choose up to three:	11
3.6 Question 11: What audience do you think should be prioritised for training on flood risk issues?	12
<b>4 Survey results – Your authority</b>	<b>13</b>
4.1 Question 12: Does your authority include (please tick all that apply):	13

---

4.2	Question 13: Does your local planning authority have an officer (or officers) that specialises in flood risk (for example, they manage the strategic flood risk assessment)?	13
4.3	Question 14: To what extent do you consider the following issues and barriers are impacting your authority's ability to implement planning policies for flood risk?	14
4.4	Question 15: To what extent do you consider that the following resource issues are impacting your authority's ability to implement planning policies for flood risk?	18
4.5	Q16: Do you think your authority would be interested in hosting one of these pilot sessions?	19
4.6	Q17: Are you aware of any examples of good (or bad) practice within your authority area that you are willing to share?	19
<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>19</b>
5.1	Resources	19
5.2	Audience	19
5.3	Priority topics	19

---

## 1 Overview

### 1.1 Headline findings

- The survey results make a clear case for supporting further training and CPD for local authority planning and flood risk officers, with 27% respondents feeling they did not have the skills and expertise to account for flood risk and the impacts of climate change in planning decisions.
- 37% of respondents felt their authority lacked the capacity and resources to take planning decisions that account for flood risk and the impacts of climate change on flood risk.
- Respondents have a varied level of knowledge across flood risk topics and activities, with a high level of officers reporting poor levels of knowledge on important topics such as evaluating SuDS, application of climate change allowances and understanding natural flood management.
- The survey results demonstrate a strong appetite to access more training and improve knowledge. Respondents tended to prioritise topics that form a key part of their role including application of the sequential and exceptions tests, checking flood risk assessments and managing development in areas at risk of surface water flooding.
- Respondents indicated that a range of training resources would be useful, with a strong preference for webinars or virtual training sessions.
- A range of barriers are impacting authorities' ability to implement planning policies for flood risk, with insufficient staff capacity and resources, tension with other priorities and lack of access to expertise amongst the most identified challenges.

### 1.2 Background

The TCPA are working with the Environment Agency to support local authority and risk management authority skills and capabilities, and improve understanding of the principles, policy, barriers, opportunities and challenges regarding the role and contribution to:

- Flood and coastal erosion risk management, and
- Sustainable and climate resilient development and infrastructure.

To inform the delivery of this project, a survey of local planning authority (LPA) officers was delivered in late 2022. The survey sought perspectives on skills, resources and knowledge of a range of flood risk and climate change topics. The survey also sought to understand barriers facing LPAs in implementing flood risk strategies through the planning system.

It was decided to exclude specific questions on coastal erosion topics from the survey, as another survey aimed at a similar audience was planned by other agencies in due course. Findings from this survey will also be used to inform the training programme when available.

This report presents the results of the survey and a short initial narrative analysis of the results.

### 1.3 Promotion

The survey was sent by email directly to planning teams in England. The survey was also promoted through:

- Environment Agency and TCPA networks and partners including ADEPT, Association of Suds Authorities, PAS and the LGA
  - Sent to attendees of two TCPA training webinars on planning for flood risk (which were presented by the EA)
  - TCPA newsletters and social media posts
  - Inclusion in EA updates within the November 2022 Chief Planners newsletter.
-

The survey was hosted on Survey Monkey and was live for four weeks, between 17 November and 18 December 2022.

#### 1.4 Survey respondents

The number of participants that commenced the survey was 2,015. However, there was a significant drop off in participation for the second section of the survey. This may be because respondents did not get round to completion, they felt the survey was not aimed at them, or because the questions became slightly more complex. Because the main findings of the survey are in section 2 and 3, those respondents that did not make it past section one of the survey have been deleted for the purposes of this analysis. This survey therefore represents **159 participants**, with **148 completing** the full survey, and representing **102 different authorities**. The survey results are presented by question below.

## 2 Survey results – About you

### 2.1 Question 2: Job Title

Data from the 159 respondents who completed questions on the next sections were analysed. There were 156 responses to this question.

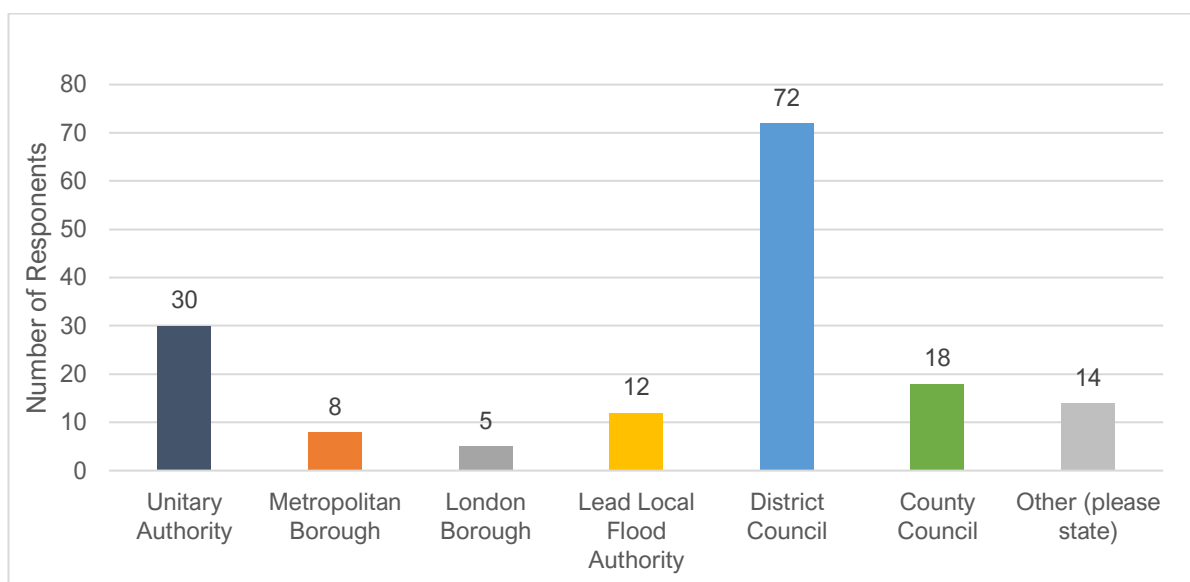
The most commonly listed job titles from respondents were:

	Planning	DM	Flood	Climate	Other
Director/Assistant Director	3				2
Assistant Engineer	1				
Assistant Manager		1			
Assistant Officer			1		
Consultant	1				1
Coordinator	1				
Engineer			6	1	11
Graduate Officer	1				
Head	7	1		2	1
Manager	7	9	4	3	1
Officer	16	1	3	4	1
Principal Officer	17		1	1	
Senior Officer	17	3	3		1
Specialist	1	2	1	1	2
Team Leader	2	4	1		
Other					6
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>27</b>

This was an open question, so job titles have been categorised by job role and career level. The results show responses were received across different levels of seniority, and also from different specialisms, with planning officers making up 61% of respondents. It is worth noting that respondents in column one may also contain planning officers with development management (DM) responsibilities, as only those that indicated DM as part of their role are included in column two. It is therefore not possible to provide a breakdown of policy and DM respondents.

## 2.2 Question 5: Type of authority

The majority of the respondents were from local planning authorities, with over forty percent of respondents from District Councils (representing authorities with planning responsibilities in two tier areas). Including respondents from Unitary, Metropolitan Borough and London Borough Councils, respondents from LPAs made up 69% of the total. The graph below illustrates the responses from the 159 survey respondents that completed beyond this section.



10% of respondents chose ‘other’ in response to this question, demonstrating both the range of different authorities engaged in planning for climate change and flood risk, but also in some cases that the survey was completed by people outside of the target audience. Responses to the ‘other’ option included:

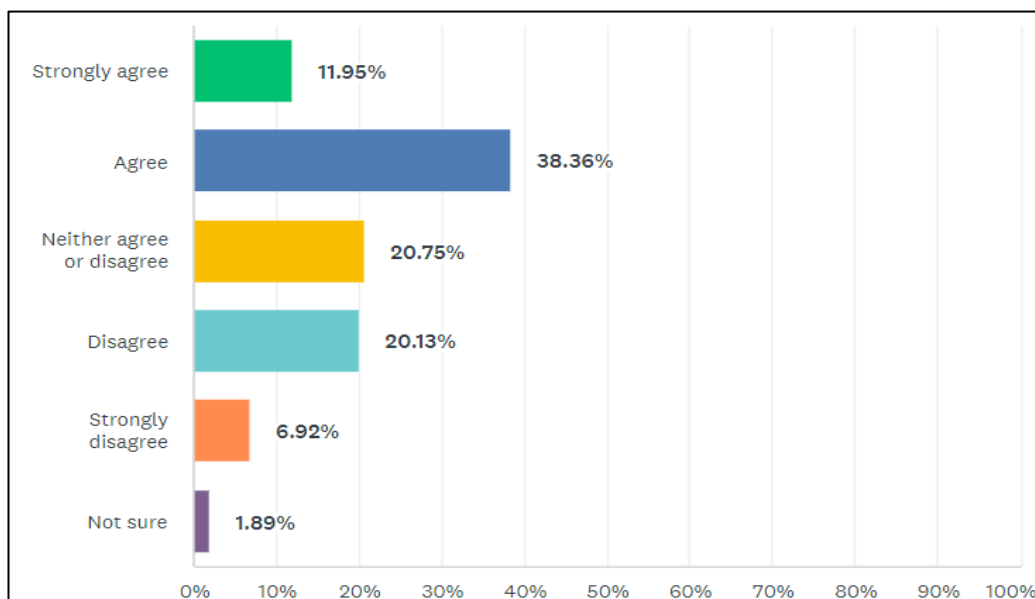
- Environment Agency
- Retired
- Consultancy
- Housing developer
- City Council
- National Park Authority x2
- Borough Council x2
- Soon to become a Unitary x2
- Internal Drainage Board - works in partnership with LLFA
- District + LLFA
- LLFA and private consultancy

## 3 Survey results – Your authority’s training need

This section asked participants to answer questions relating to their training needs.

### 3.1 Question 6: To what extent do you agree that you have the relevant skills and expertise to take planning decisions/recommendations that account for flood risk and the impacts of climate change on flood risk?

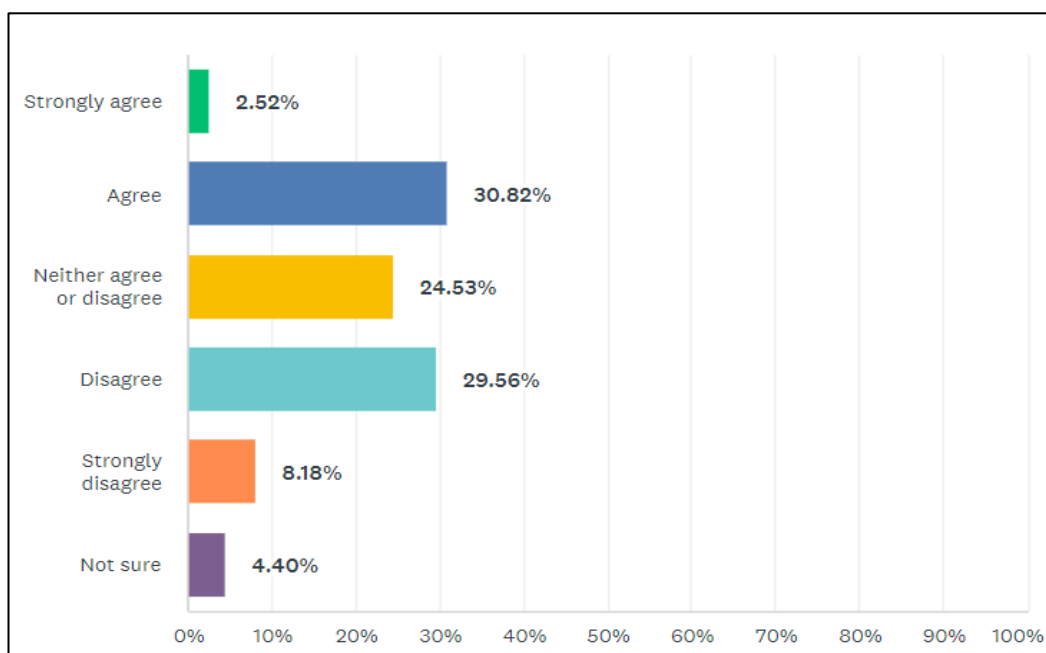
This question was completed by 159 respondents.



Around 50% of respondents replied positively that they had the skills and expertise to make planning decisions and recommendations that account for flood risk. Just over 20% neither agreed nor disagreed, but 27% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This implies that nearly a third of respondents feel that they require more skills and expertise to deal with flood risk and climate change impacts on flood risk within their roles.

**3.2 Question 7: To what extent do you agree that your authority has the capacity and resources to take planning decisions that account for flood risk and the impacts of climate change on flood risk?**

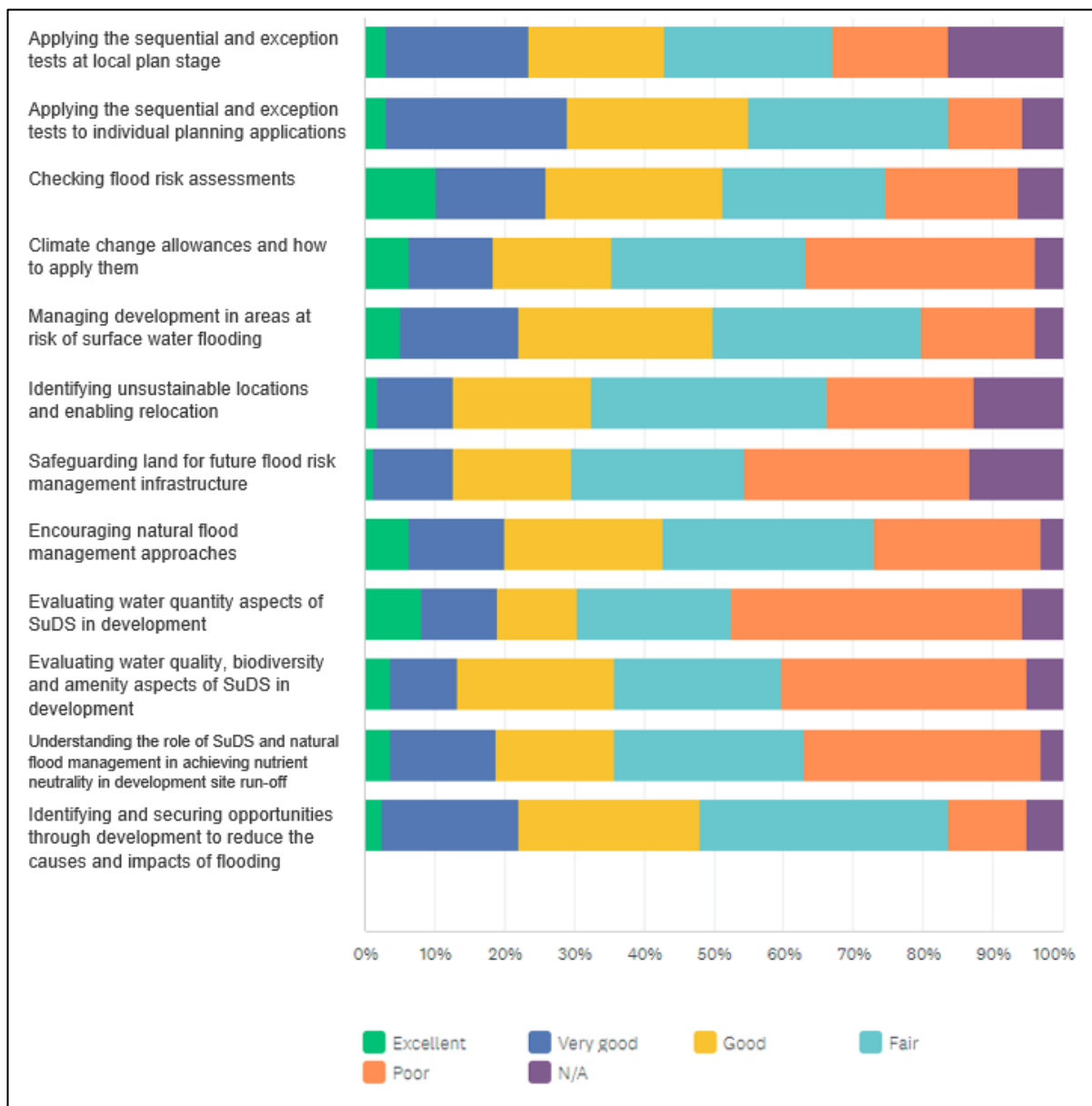
This question was completed by 159 respondents.



37% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that their authority had the capacity and resources to take planning decisions that account for flood risk and the impacts of climate change on flood risk, compared to 33% that agreed or strongly agreed (only 2.5% respondents).

### 3.3 Question 8: How would you rate your current level of knowledge of the following flood risk management topics and activities?

This question was completed by 159 respondents. No respondents answered ‘other’.



Responses to this question demonstrate that there is a varied picture of how officers rate their knowledge across flood risk and climate change topics. Looking at the responses to ‘excellent’, ‘very good’ and ‘good’ across the topics, the results indicate that of the topics listed, officers feel most knowledgeable about:

- Applying the sequential and exception tests to individual planning applications,

- Identifying opportunities to reduce the causes and impacts of flooding through development,
- Managing development in areas at risk of surface water flooding, and
- Checking flood risk assessments.

However, even for the topics where more respondents reported a higher level of knowledge, there are still indications that this could be higher. For example:

- 39% of respondents considered themselves to have ‘poor’ or ‘fair’ understanding of applying the sequential and exception tests to individual planning applications, and
- 16% respondents felt they had a poor knowledge of managing development in areas at risk of surface water flooding.

Looking at the job titles of those that responded in this way indicates that officers involved in policy, development management and flood risk reported poor knowledge of these topics.

Topics where respondents more commonly rated their knowledge as ‘poor’ included:

- Evaluating water quantity aspects of SuDS in development,
- Evaluating water quality, biodiversity and amenity aspects of SuDS in development,
- Understanding the role of SuDS and natural flood management in achieving nutrient neutrality in development site run off, and
- Climate change allowances and how to apply them.

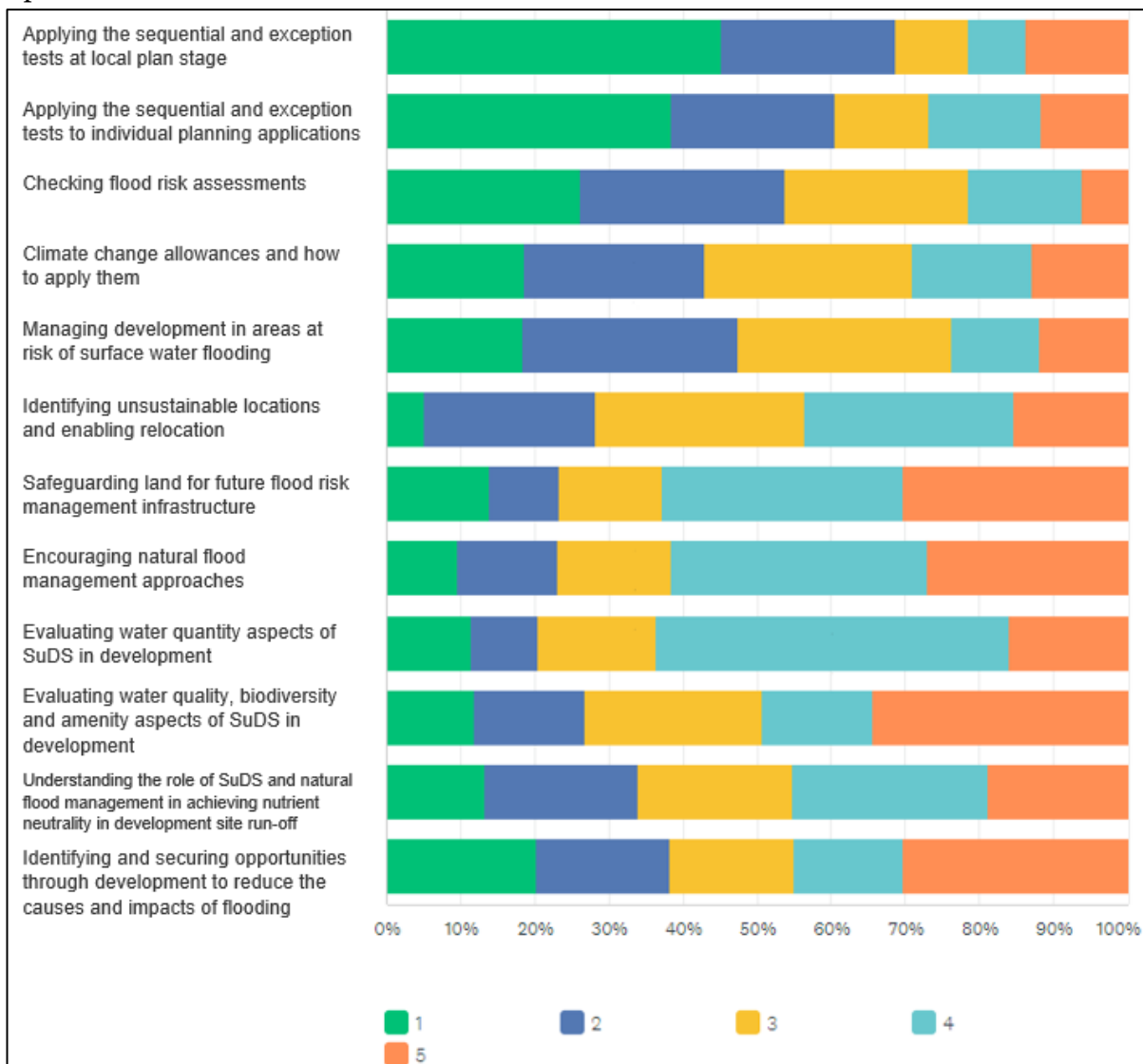
A significant number also rated their knowledge of natural flood management approaches (34%) and safeguarding land for future flood risk management infrastructure (32%) as poor. These results indicate a potential appetite for training on best practice in delivery of SuDS and also on long term considerations for managing flood risk.

---



3.4 **Question 9: Which five flood risk management topics would you prioritise for training and resources to develop your understanding and knowledge? Choose up to five with ‘1’ indicating the highest priority:**

This question was completed by 158 respondents. Nine respondents responded to the ‘other’ option.



Despite Question 8 results showing more respondents reporting better knowledge of the application of the sequential and exceptions tests than other topics, this has emerged as a key priority for training by respondents. This may reflect the fundamental importance of these tests in national policy implementation, and also the fact that the planning practice guidance around their application has recently been updated. The next most prioritised topics for training and resources were checking flood risk assessments and managing development in areas at risk of surface water flooding.

The *least* prioritised areas for training include:

- Safeguarding land for future flood risk management infrastructure,
- Encouraging natural flood management approaches,
- Evaluating water quantity aspects of SuDS in development, and
- Evaluating water quality aspects of SuDS in development.

It is worth noting that there is not a strong correlation between the topics that respondents most commonly reported as areas where their knowledge was poorest, and those that they prioritise for training. This may reflect the fact that training is most desired for topics that form a more substantive part of people's roles, is an area where national guidance has recently been updated and may also be influenced by respondents' areas of interest.

It is also important to consider how wider policy drivers match with respondents' priorities for training. Areas that are not necessarily prioritised by respondents (such as safeguarding land and natural flood management) may need prioritisation to ensure training enables officers to address wider strategic approaches to addressing flood risk and climate change.

Of the respondents that ticked 'other' as a priority for training, their comments included:

- Consultation with internal drainage engineers
- Groundwater flood risk
- Understanding the statistical relationship of development type in flood zones following refusal
- Understanding what is meant by minor development
- Impact of density assumptions for increasing water storage requirements
- Clarity on the roles of EA and LLFA on assessment of impacts on water quality.

Most of these suggestions are quite specific technical or procedural issues that could be covered within broader training topics.

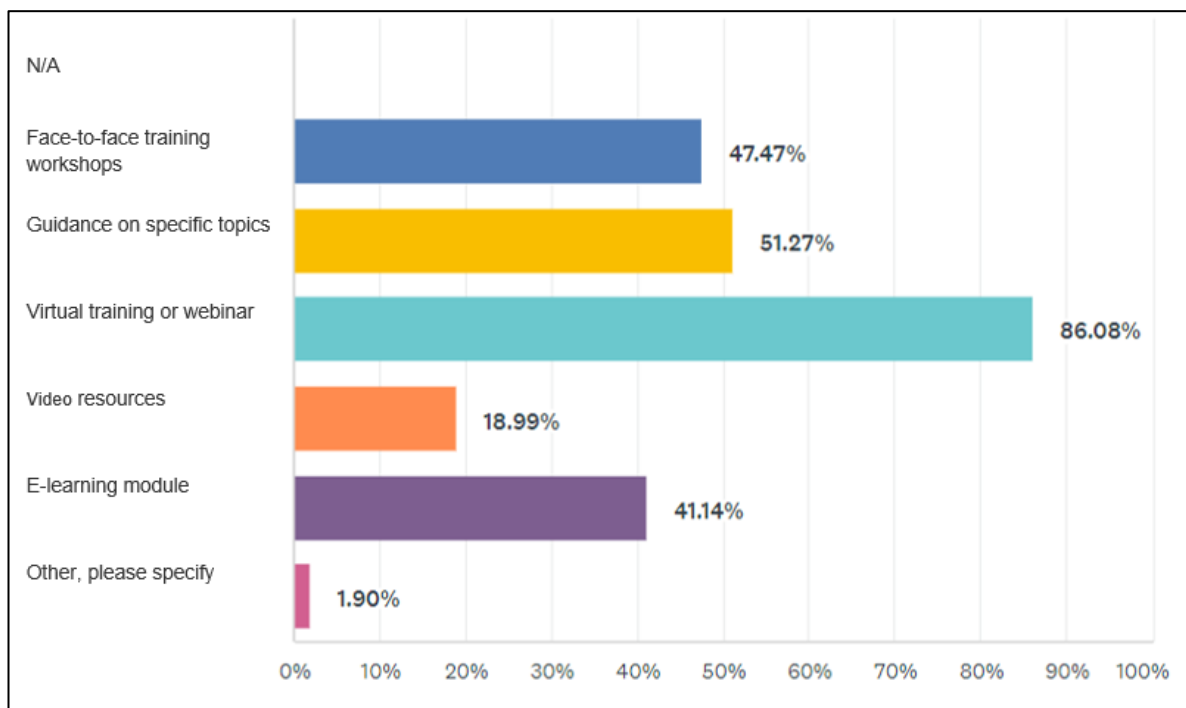
A couple of respondents expressed that they felt all the topics should already be provided as training for planning and flood risk officers.

When the results are broken down by the category of the respondent's role (planning, development management and flood/climate change) the following trends appear, although the sample size for some categories is fairly small:

- Planning roles most commonly list "Applying the sequential and exception tests at local plan stage" as the highest priority (17% as 1<sup>st</sup> priority) but the responses to this question are still fairly spread out.
  - Development management roles most commonly list "Applying the sequential and exception tests to individual planning applications" as the highest priority (48% as 1<sup>st</sup> priority).
  - Flood and climate change roles tended to give greater priority to "Applying the sequential and exception tests at local plan stage", "Applying the sequential and exception tests to individual planning applications" and "Climate change allowances and how to apply them" with each option listed as 1<sup>st</sup> priority by at least 15% respondents.
  - Planning and Development Management roles report "Identifying and securing opportunities through development to reduce the causes and impacts of flooding" and "Safeguarding land for future flood risk management infrastructure" as low priorities.
  - Flood and climate change roles report "Evaluating water quantity aspects of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) in development" as the lowest priority.
-

3.5 **Question 10: What type of training resources do you consider would be most useful to improve your understanding of flood risk issues? Choose up to three:**

This question was completed by 158 respondents. Three respondents responded to the ‘other’ option.



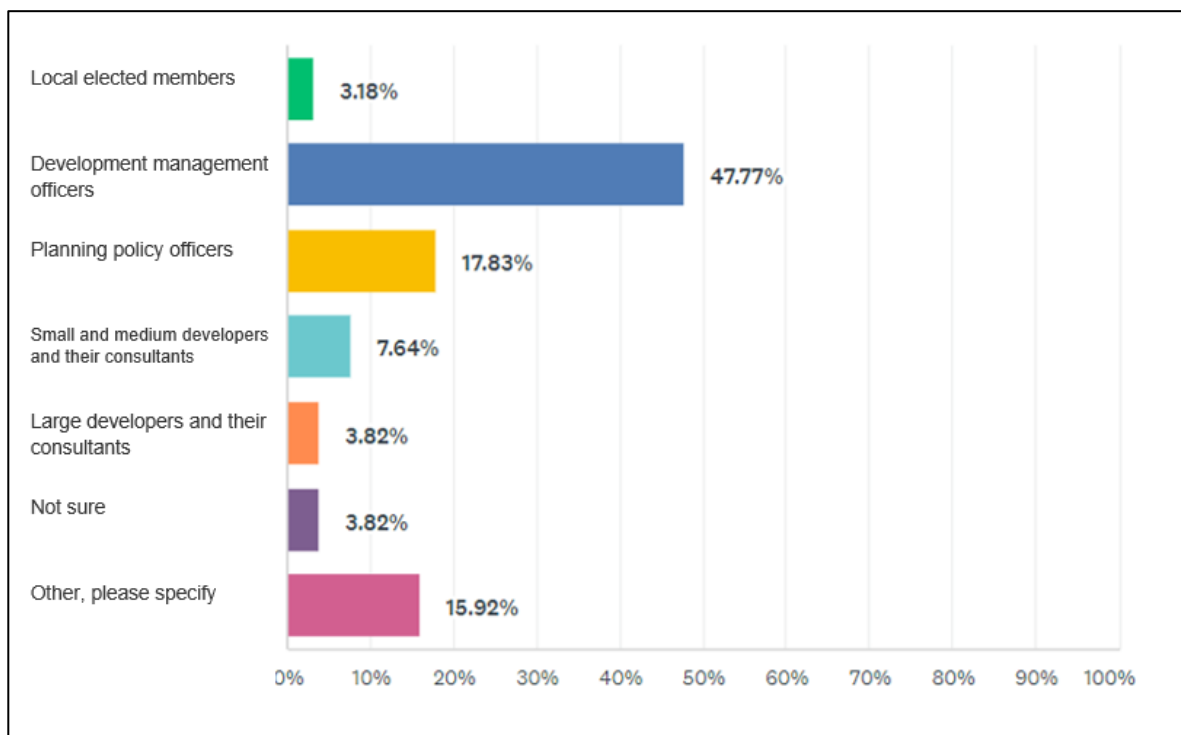
The results show interest in different forms of training resources, with video resource being less popular than the other suggested formats. The very strong appetite for virtual training / webinars gives confidence that this is a valued and accessible platform to deliver training and CPD. However, the fact that over 40% of respondents selected guidance on topics, e-learning and face to face workshops indicates these would also be welcome resources.

Comments received in the ‘other’ box were:

- *All of these depending on the topic. Face to face might be particularly useful for some authorities on site.*
- *Guidance is good but could be better if combined with short video/audio sessions to explain key points to ensure they are interpreted as intended.*
- *Visit case study/best practice examples.*

**3.6 Question 11: What audience do you think should be prioritised for training on flood risk issues?**

This question was completed by 157 respondents. 25 respondents responded to the ‘other’ option.



The results indicate a clear prioritisation of training for development management officers, indicating that respondents view the need for skills and knowledge to be most acute within the decision-making function of local planning authorities. It is interesting that only 3% of respondents prioritised local elected members, perhaps indicating that local councillor knowledge of some of the more technical aspects of planning for flood risk is not viewed as a significant issue for local authorities, or at least indicates a view that training for members should not be prioritised above CPD for authority officers.

Most of the responses to the ‘other’ options indicated that more than one, or all of the options, should be prioritised (some responses indicated that DM officers plus the choice indicated should be included). Some respondents suggested consultees and developers require training.

When analysing the data for question 11 against role categories the below indicates a tendency to self-select their own job roles and those that they are likely to engage with as part of their role. (Please note this does not include those who answered ‘Not sure’ or ‘Other, please specify’).

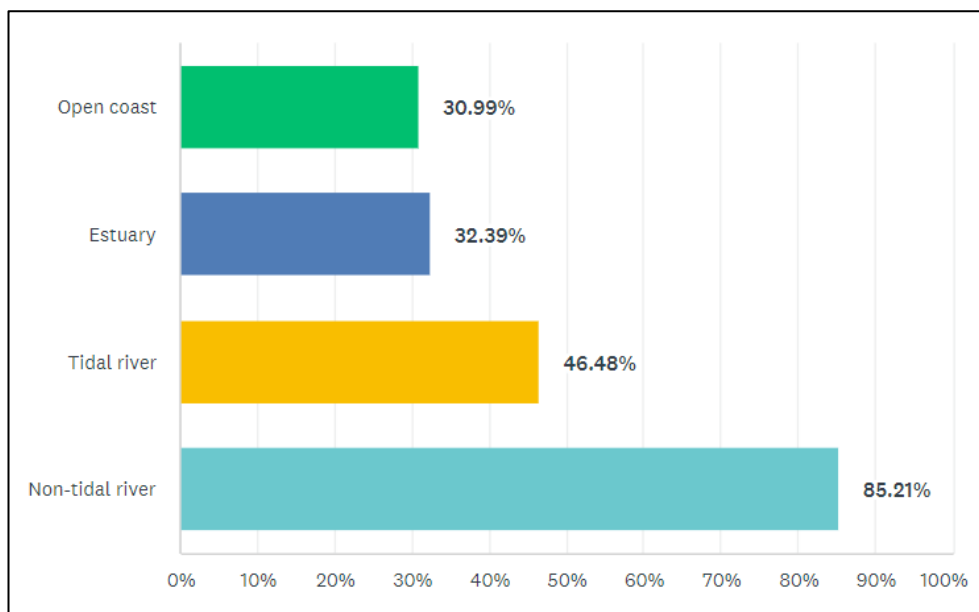
	Development management officers	Large developers and consultants	Local elected members	Planning policy officers	SMEs and consultants
<b>Planning</b>	34%	1%	1%	19%	11%
<b>DM</b>	76%	5%	5%	0%	5%
<b>CC &amp; Flood</b>	39%	6%	0%	24%	6%

#### 4 Survey results – Your authority

The questions in this section asked for more information about authorities’ resources and also asked respondents to reflect on some of the issues and barriers that affect the implementation of policies and strategies to address flood risk.

##### 4.1 Question 12: Does your authority include (please tick all that apply):

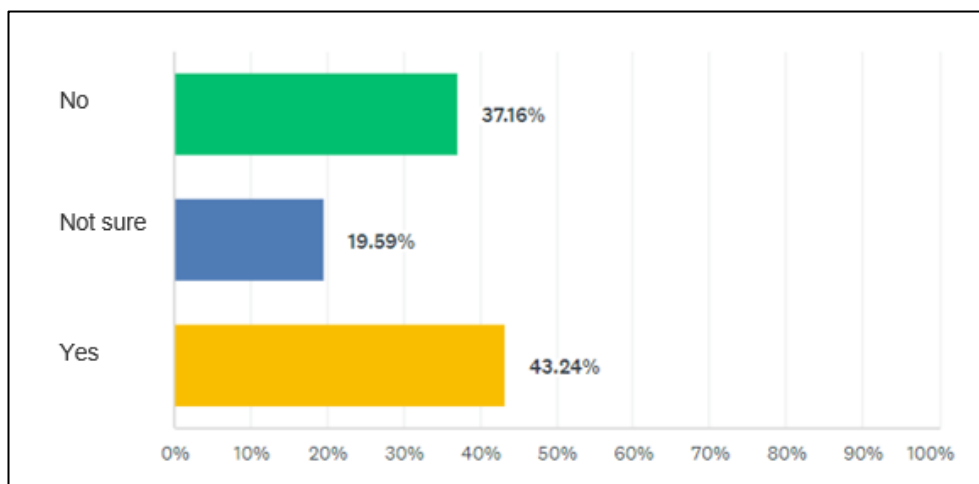
This question was completed by 142 respondents.



Whilst the results reflect the varied geographical contexts in which local planning authorities operate, they also illustrate that training will need to be responsive to different contexts for managing flood risk.

##### 4.2 Question 13: Does your local planning authority have an officer (or officers) that specialises in flood risk (for example, they manage the strategic flood risk assessment)?

This question was completed by 148 respondents.



Respondents that answered ‘yes’ were asked to indicate how many full time equivalent (FTE) posts were allocated to addressing flood risk at their authorities. The results show the vast

majority of those that do have specialist flood risk officers have less than two FTEs. One FTE was the most common answer with 30 respondents indicating this was the level of resource at their authority.

<b>FTE Flood risk specialist officer</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
< 1 FTE	6
1 – < 2 FTE	31
2 – < 3FTE	5
3 – < 4FTE	3
4 – < 5FTE	1
5 – < 6FTE	3
6 – < 7FTE	2

The following councils reported less than 1 FTE flood risk officer:

- East Hampshire District Council
- Wealden District Council
- Peterborough City Council
- Gateshead Council
- Huntingdonshire District Council
- Leeds City Council

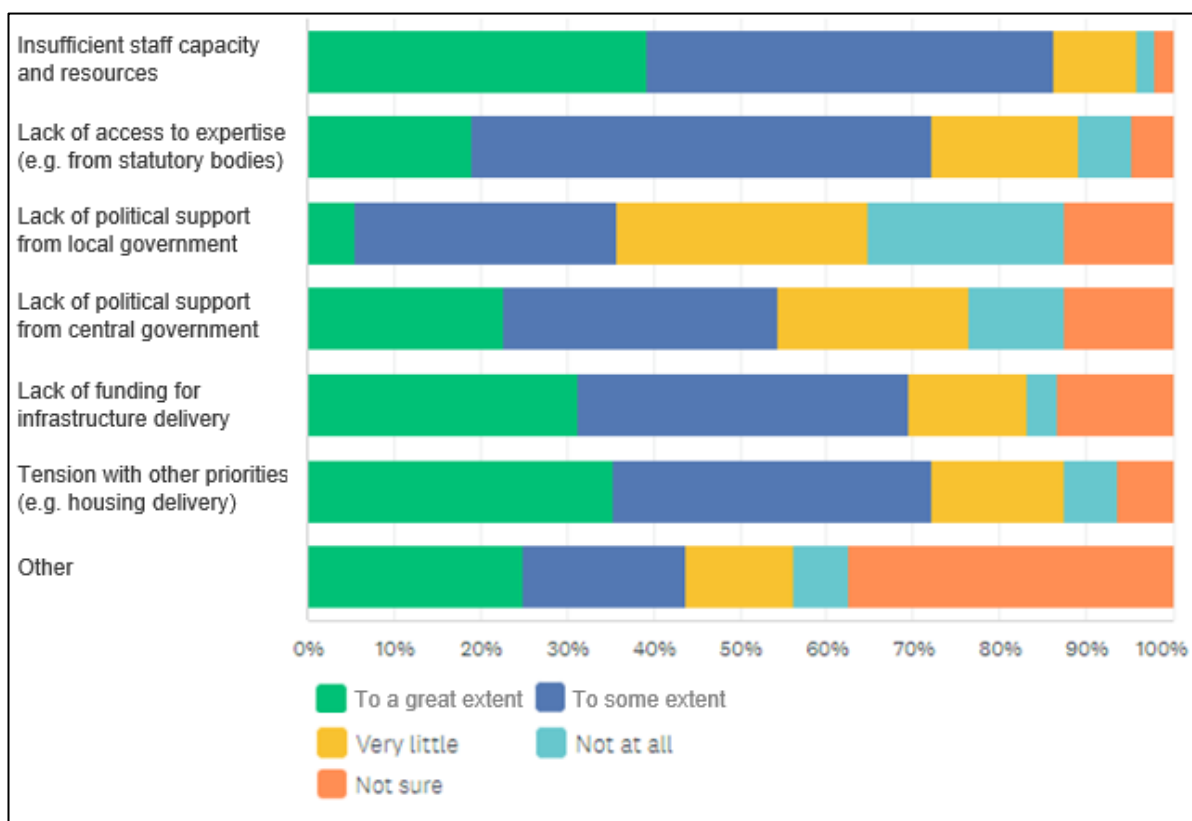
The following councils reported 4 or more FTE flood risk officer:

- Hertfordshire County Council
- Buckinghamshire Council
- Dorset Council (x2)
- Essex County Council
- City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council

Other than a couple of anomalies (which may be incorrect reporting from respondents), this generally reflects that respondents from authorities that provide the LLFA function have much higher level of resource. 37% of respondents reported no in house flood risk specialist officer.

**4.3 Question 14: To what extent do you consider the following issues and barriers are impacting your authority’s ability to implement planning policies for flood risk?**

This question was completed by 147 respondents.



The vast majority (86%) of survey respondents felt that insufficient staff capacity and resources was impacting their authority’s ability to implement planning policies for flood risk, either to a great extent (39%) or to some extent (47%). Only 2% of respondents felt that capacity and resources was not impacting their authority at all in this way.

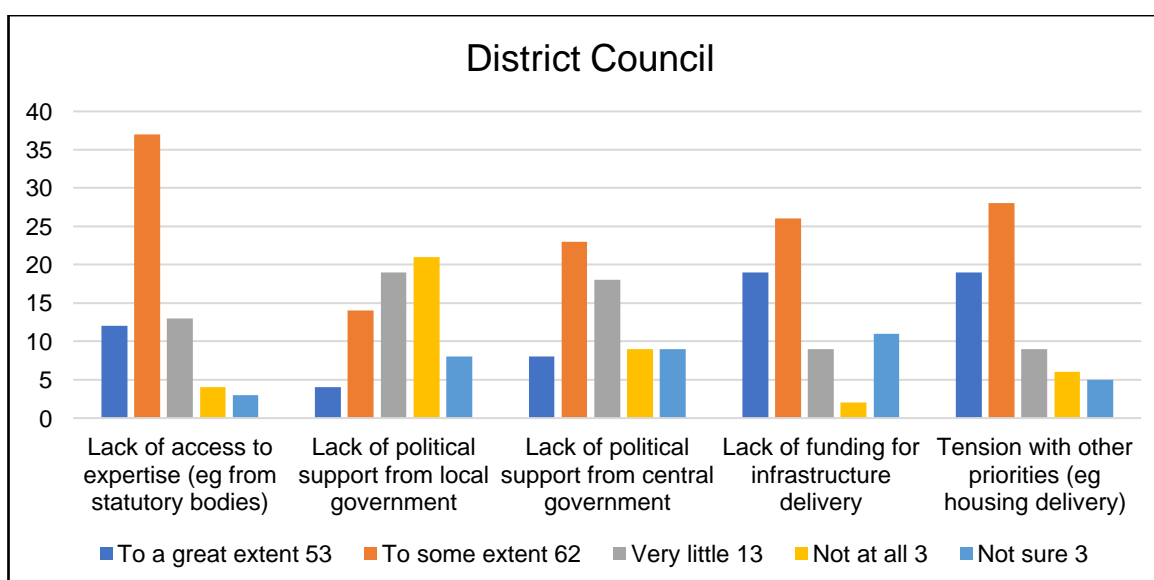
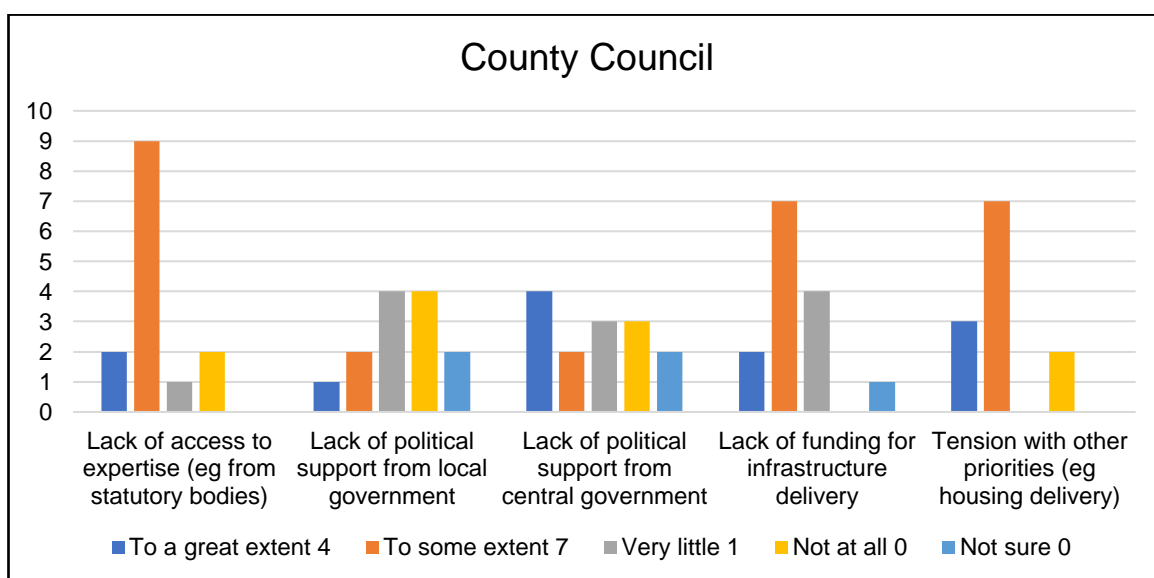
A relatively high number of respondents (35%) felt that tension with other priorities was a barrier ‘to a great extent’, with a further 37% reporting this ‘to some extent’. The graph of results shows a similar number of respondents felt that a lack of funding for infrastructure delivery was an issue (31% to a great extent and 38% to some extent). Less respondents (19%) felt that lack of access to expertise was a problem to a great extent, but over half of respondents (53%) reported that this was an issue to some extent.

The results on whether local and national political support was an issue or barrier show that respondents feel lack of political support at a national level is more an issue to a great extent than lack of local political support (23% as compared to 6%). A similar number of respondents viewed this as a problem to some extent (32% national and 30% local). It is also worth noting that 23% of respondents felt that lack of local political support was not an issue or barrier at all, more than for any of the other issues listed. This perhaps demonstrates that local levels of political support are quite varied across England, which might strengthen the argument for stronger national prioritisation of flood risk policy to avoid inconsistent approaches. The graphs below show that local political support is also perceived differently across different authority types, being perceived as less of a barrier at County Councils when compared to Unitary and Metropolitan Boroughs.

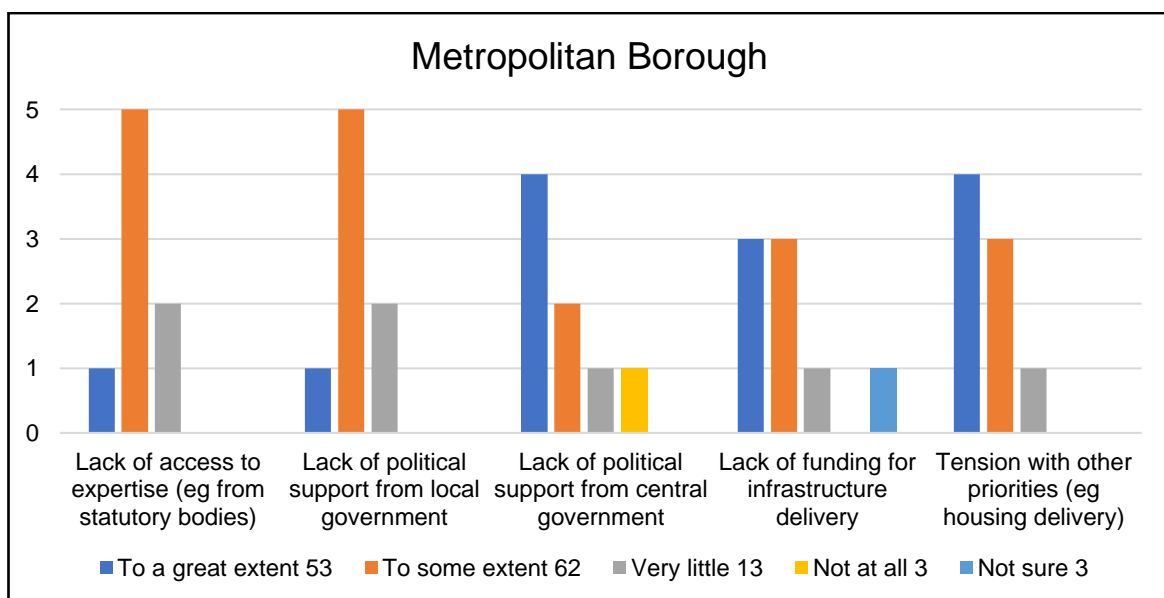
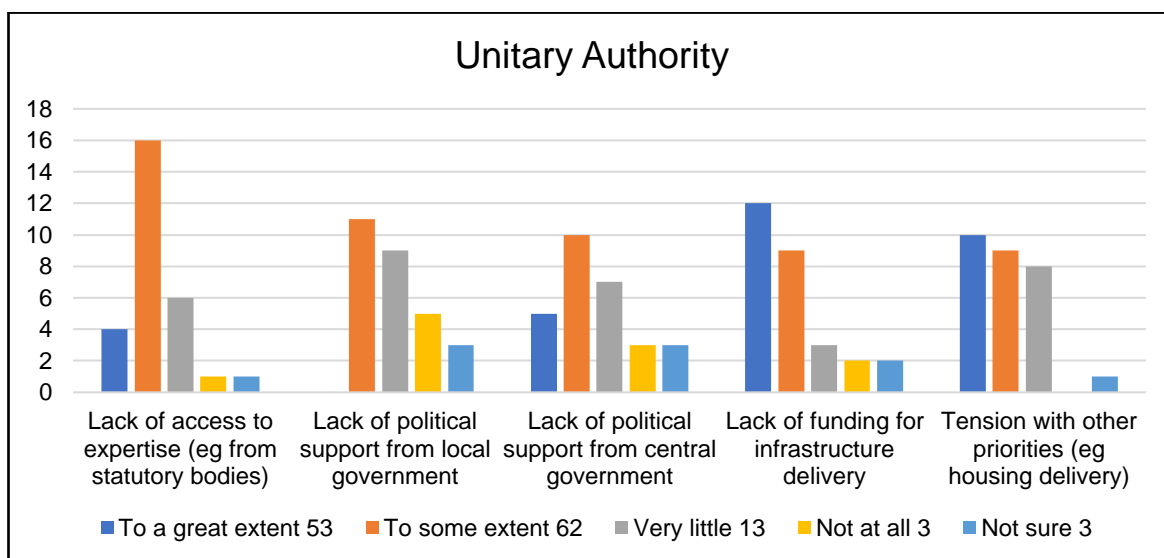
16 respondents selected ‘other’ as an option, with five of these explaining they were ‘not sure’. Respondents listed the below issues:

- Lack of senior management understanding and prioritisation of flood risk issues
- Lack of a specialist flood officer within the authority
- Lack of government funding for planning and flood defences
- Lack of clarity around key issues such as refusing development in flood risk areas and consideration of moving communities from flood areas
- Localised actions such as paving over gardens and awareness of all sources of flooding
- Lack of resource at the Environment Agency impacting their ability to review applications where strict policies on flood risk are in place
- Slow implementation of national commitments.

The graphs below illustrate these results when broken down by authority type.

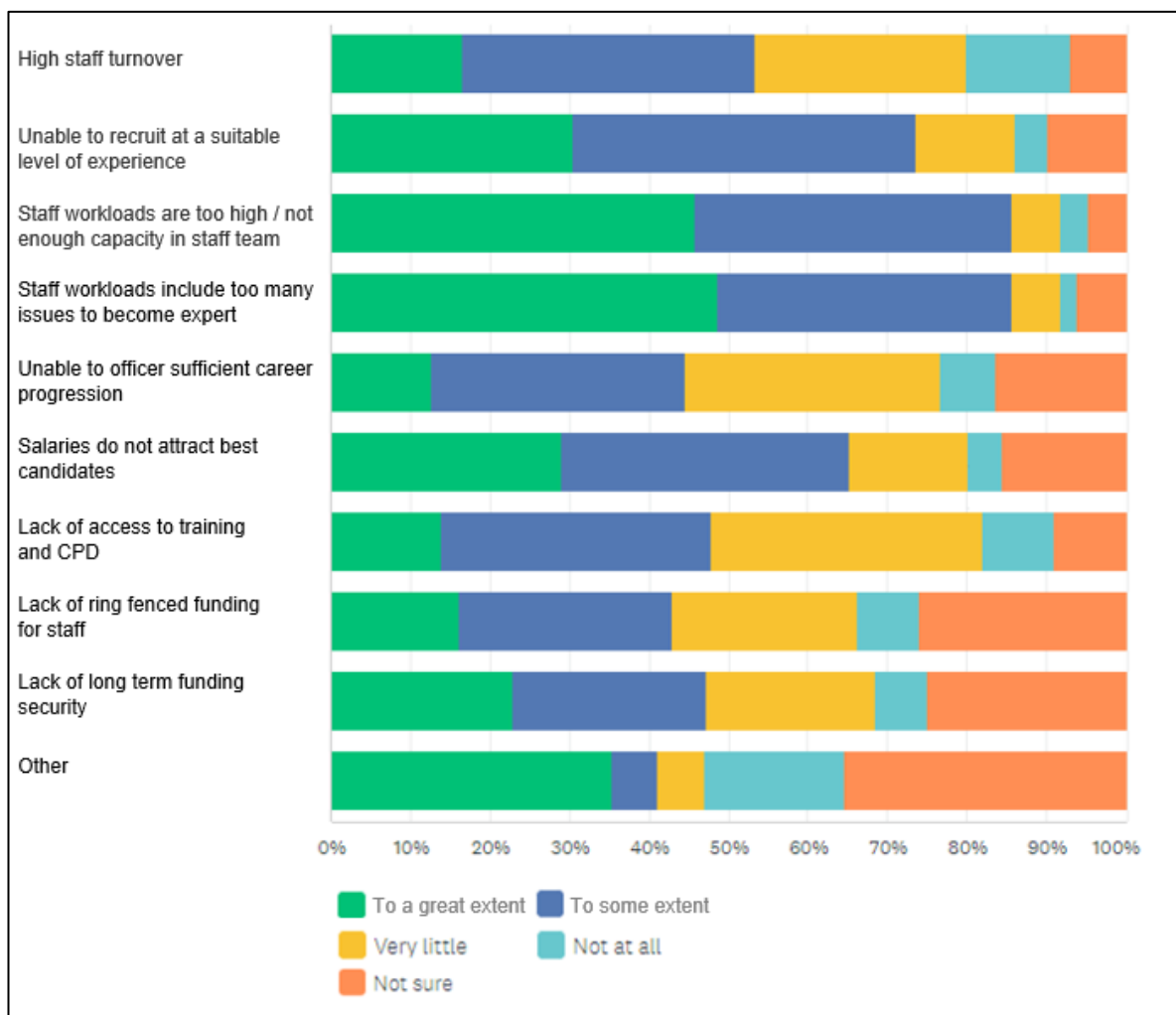






4.4 **Question 15: To what extent do you consider that the following resource issues are impacting your authority's ability to implement planning policies for flood risk?**

This question was completed by 146 respondents.



The two issues that were identified by respondents as being the most significant barriers were:

- Staff workloads are too high / not enough capacity in staff team (46% to a great extent and 40% to some extent). Only 3% respondents said high workloads were not an issue at all.
- Staff workloads include too many issues to become expert (49% to a great extent and 37% to a great extent). Only 2% respondents said this was not an issue at all.

A significant number of respondents also answered that recruiting at a suitable level of experience was an issue (31% to a great extent and 43% to some extent) and that salaries do not attract the best candidates (29% to a great extent and 36% to some extent), indicating that recruitment is also seen as significant challenge by authority staff. What is perhaps most striking about the results is that all the issues scored relatively highly, with all options listed scored as an issue to either a great or to some extent by nearly 50% of respondents.

18 respondents selected 'other' in response to this question. Six of those were 'not sure'. Respondents mentioned the following issues:

- Budgetary pressures on the local authority, particularly in context of rising costs

- Reliance on the LLFA / other specialist advice which have their own resource and staffing challenges
- No resource to raise awareness
- Sense that flood issues are ‘too costly and too huge’ to address so get avoided
- Poor leadership politically and managerially
- Uncertainty caused by local government reorganisation
- Reliance on agency planners that lack local knowledge.

#### 4.5 **Q16: Do you think your authority would be interested in hosting one of these pilot sessions?**

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to indicate if their authorities would be interested in hosting a pilot training session in early 2023. 44 respondents expressed interest in this opportunity and these responses are being used to identify host authorities for our training pilots.

#### 4.6 **Q17: Are you aware of any examples of good (or bad) practice within your authority area that you are willing to share?**

Respondents were also asked if they knew of best practice examples that could potentially be used in training resources.

### 5 **Recommendations**

#### 5.1 **Resources**

Responses to Question 10 indicate that prioritising training resources that address more commonly experienced flood risk issues, such as surface water and fluvial flood risk, may be a sensible focus for more openly available resources (e.g. online webinars and web based resources). Face to face training may be more helpfully delivered where there are more localised and overlaid flood risk issues at play. Different training resources can also be utilised to provide complimentary packages of information that respond to the topic and target audience. For example, introductory videos can provide context for more in depth online webinars or face to face to sessions. Learning from the webinars can be enhanced through provision of more detailed written guidance.

#### 5.2 **Audience**

The responses to Question 11 do indicate that DM officers should be a priority audience for training, however this may be slightly skewed by respondents selecting their own roles as the priority audience. The target audiences for training topics should inform the appropriate resource and pitch for delivery. Key activities that DM, policy and flood risk officers need to be familiar with (such as sequential and exceptions tests) could be delivered online to reach a broader audience. Guidance that is of more relevance to specific roles could be more targeted to provide more detailed technical guidance where required.

#### 5.3 **Priority topics**

The survey results have helpfully illustrated where there is strong appetite for more CPD and training. Drawing from the responses to questions 8 & 9, information gathered from feedback to recent training, and with consideration of broader national policy drivers, the topics below are suggested as potential priorities for training in 2023/24. Coastal risk issues may also emerge as a priority from other survey results, but this was not in scope of this survey.

---

- Sequential and exceptions tests (including local plan stage and accounting for all sources of flood risk). This is rated as a high priority by respondents, changes in PPG mean this is timely, and there is interest across roles.
- Checking flood risk assessments was another topic prioritised by survey respondents.
- Flood risk planning and climate change. Suggest pitching this at a fairly high level, this would have potential to:
  - Address topics prioritised in the survey (climate change allowances, surface water flooding)
  - Address some of the key themes raised through comments and feedback to training (changes to future flood plains, coastal erosion risk)
  - Cover topics that are less prioritised by respondents but increasingly important for planners to understand (safeguarding land and relocation).

A high-level webinar pitched at varied levels of expertise could be supported by more in-depth resources that cover more detail on specific topics.

- Another potential area to prioritise is SuDS. Although not prioritised by respondents, results indicated that existing knowledge could be improved. Given the announcement that SuDS will soon be mandatory in all new development, understanding the qualitative aspects of SuDS in particular may be helpful (with follow up training on practice and implementation when there is clarity around the timetable for Schedule 3).
-